

## **Nutrition and Lifestyle for a Healthy Pregnancy**

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If you are pregnant or trying to become pregnant, this is the article for you to read. Pregnancy is a critical period during which good maternal nutrition is a key factor influencing the health of both child and mother. Women need to attain good nutritional status before, during, and after pregnancy to optimize maternal health and reduce the risk of birth defects.

There are a few simple things a woman can do to optimize the health and well-being of their unborn child: consume a variety of foods according to the MyPyramid guidelines, achieve appropriate weight gain, and maintain a healthy lifestyle inclusive of daily physical activity.

### **Optimizing Outcome through Good Nutrition:**

Women should consume a variety of foods according to the MyPyramid guidelines recommended by the United States Department of Agriculture. Whole grains, leafy green and yellow vegetables, and fruit should be consumed daily to meet the critical nutrient needs (vitamin C, vitamin A, and folic acid) and provide enough fiber (i.e. oranges, broccoli, berries, melons, dried beans and peas, and tomatoes). Select cereals and bread products that are fortified with iron. Calcium rich and calcium fortified foods should also be considered in your daily meal plan. Meat, poultry, seafood, legumes, and nuts are important sources of protein, as well as zinc, iron, and magnesium.

Not only is it important to monitor your food intake, it is also critical to know which foods are not recommended to consume during pregnancy. The following table displays foods not recommended for consumption:

Food Group	Foods Not Recommended
Beverages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Alcohol</li><li>• Excessive Caffeine (&gt;300mg/day – 85 mg/5 oz cup coffee, or 30 mg/5 oz cup tea, or 36 mg/12 oz soda)</li><li>• Herbal Teas</li></ul>
Meat, Poultry, or Fish	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Raw or uncooked meats, fish, poultry or eggs</li><li>• All other fish should be limited to 12 ounces or less per week. This includes canned tuna.</li><li>• Shark</li><li>• Swordfish</li><li>• King Mackerel</li><li>• Tilefish</li></ul>
Milk and Dairy Products	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Raw or unpasteurized cheeses or dairy products such as soft cheeses (feta or brie), blue cheese, and Mexican-style cheeses</li></ul>

Other non-food items that should be avoided during pregnancy include tobacco, herbal and botanical supplements, alternative remedies, food additives and ingredients, and vitamin/mineral supplements other than those recommended or prescribed by your doctor, nurse practitioner, or midwife.

Also important in pregnancy is following safe food handling procedures because of one's increased risk of foodborne illness. Just use common sense, keep cold foods cold and hot foods hot. Ensure foods are cooked thoroughly and stored properly. Also, do not mix raw meat products with raw foods. All these precautions and more will help reduce your risk of foodborne illness

### **Appropriate Weight Gain:**

Recommendations for weight gain during pregnancy should be individualized according to pre-pregnancy body mass index (BMI) to improve pregnancy outcome and avoid excessive maternal postpartum weight retention. Generally, women do not need to increase their calories during the first trimester of pregnancy. However, the additional needs during the second and third trimesters are approximately 300 calories/day.

Maternal weight gain must support the products of conception (fetus, placenta, and amniotic fluid) and maternal accretion of tissues (expansion of blood volume and extracellular fluid, uterine and mammary glands, and maternal fat stores).

The following table presents guidelines for prenatal weight gain:

	Recommended Weight Gain (pounds)
BMI < 19.8 (Low)	28-40 lbs
BMI 19.8-26.0 (Normal)	25-35 lbs
BMI 26.0-29.0 (High)	15-25 lbs
BMI >29.0 (Obese)	15 lbs
Other: twin/triplet pregnancies	35-50 lbs

It is never safe to lose weight during pregnancy; both you and your baby need the proper nutrients in order to be healthy. If you find yourself gaining too much weight, here are some tips to slow your weight gain:

- When eating out, choose lower fat items (broiled chicken, salads with low-fat dressing, and vegetable entrees)
- Avoid whole milk products
- Limit sweet or sugary drinks
- Do not add salt to foods when cooking – salt causes your body to retain water
- Limit sweets and high calorie snacks
- Use fats in moderation and prepare meals using low fat cooking methods

### **Exercise Recommendations:**

During pregnancy, maternal metabolism adjusts dramatically mediated by changes in key reproductive hormones. Therefore, a regular exercise routine during pregnancy will assist in and confer health benefits to both mother and fetus. Healthy women with uncomplicated pregnancies may participate in daily moderate exercise. Activities at a low to moderate intensity level are generally safe and may include walking, swimming, running, aerobic dancing, and riding on a stationary bike.

Below are a few guidelines for a safe and healthy exercise program during pregnancy:

- First of all, before beginning any exercise routine, seek the advice of a health professional
- After 20 weeks, avoid exercises while lying on the back – this position can impede blood flow
- Avoid brisk exercise in hot, humid environments
- Avoid exercise if body temperature is elevated
- Wear comfortable shoes and clothing
- Drink plenty of water to prevent dehydration and overheating – aim for 8-10 cups/day
- Maintain an adequate intake of calories and nutrients
- Stop exercising if you have any negative symptoms (dizziness, abdominal pain, uterine contractions, etc.) and contact your prenatal provider.

Pregnancy is a miraculous time in a woman's life and should be taken very seriously. Proper nutritional status, appropriate weight gain, and maintaining a healthy lifestyle through exercise are some of the ways to optimize maternal and fetal health. Prenatal care by a doctor, nurse practitioner, or midwife is also a critical component to your pregnancy. If you should have any questions regarding nutrition in pregnancy, seek the help of a Registered Dietitian.